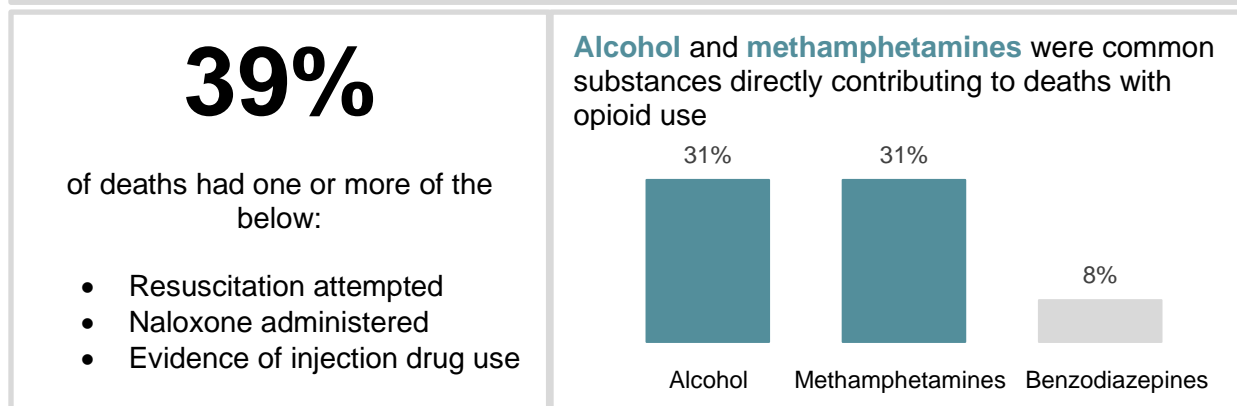
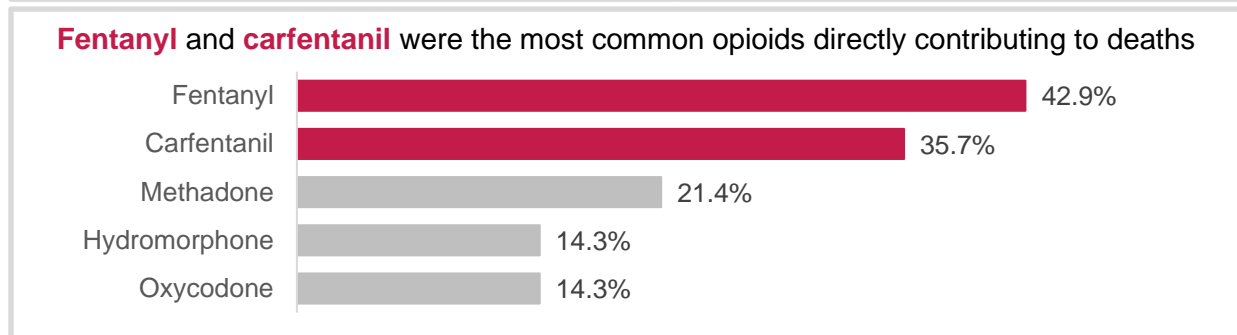
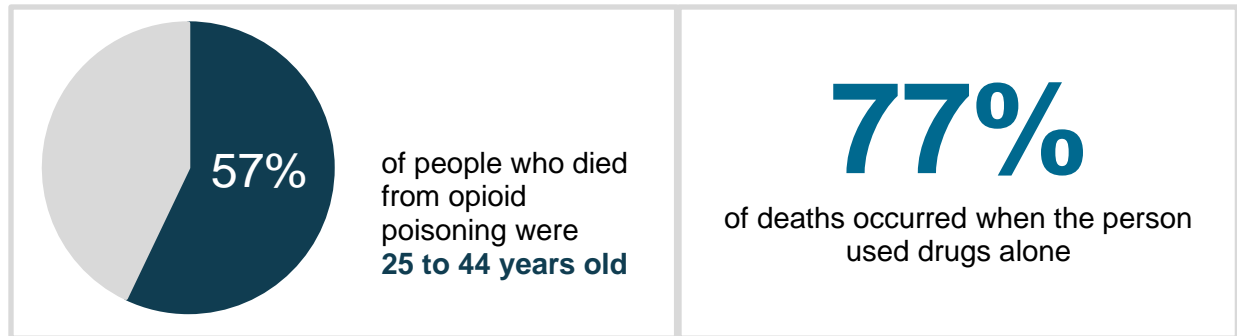


## **Opioid Deaths, Southwestern Public Health, 2019**

In 2019, there were 14 opioid-related deaths among people living in the Southwestern Public Health region (13 unintentional and 1 intentional death(s)).\* This number is comparable to previous years. However, it is predicted that 2020 data will show an increase in opioid-related harms due to emergency measures that resulted in services shifting to telephone and online, misunderstandings about what services are available, clients isolating due to public health orders which is contrary to harm reduction messages of 'don't use alone', changes to the drug supply resulting in greater availability of more toxic opioids and reduced help seeking during the COVID-19 pandemic.

### **Results Summary**

- Fentanyl remains a dangerous opioid circulating in the community. A more potent fentanyl analog, carfentanil, began circulating more widely in 2019. In 2019, there were five deaths due to carfentanil compared to one death the previous year.
- 77% of deaths occurred when the person used drugs alone. It is important to continue to advise people not to use substances alone; however, this may be especially challenging given the COVID-19 pandemic and the importance of physical distancing. The Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, Dr. Theresa Tam, recommends that people connect virtually when they use substances if they are self-isolating.
- People need to develop a safety plan and share it with others, particularly if they are self-isolating due to COVID-19. They should:
  - Call someone to let them know they are about to use or call the Overdose Prevention Line when they are about to use drugs. Staff on the Line will maintain a connection throughout the drug use episode: 1-888-853-8542 (Monday-Friday: noon-10 p.m., Saturday-Sunday: noon-midnight), <https://www.grenfellministries.org/overdose-prevention-line>
  - Plan a time to have someone check in with them at a prearranged time; tell the person to check in if they don't hear anything
  - Leave their door unlocked
  - Start low, go slow. Start with small amount first, especially after a period of non-use
  - Try small amounts first due to the inconsistent drug supply
  - Ask their doctor about a safe supply
  - Consider methadone/suboxone treatment



\*From October to December 2019 in the Southwestern Public Health region, four deaths are still under investigation.

## Reference

Coroner's Opioid Investigative Aid, May 2017 to December 2019, Office of the Chief Coroner for Ontario, extracted April 30, 2020. Report date: May 22, 2020

Quarterly data have been added to the [Opioid Monitoring Dashboard](#), which will continue to be updated as data are received.

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